

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS  
OF  
JOAN OF ARC

BY  
THE SIEUR LOUIS DE CONTE  
(HER PAGE AND SECRETARY)

FREELY TRANSLATED  
OUT OF THE ANCIENT FRENCH INTO MODERN ENGLISH  
FROM THE ORIGINAL UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT  
IN THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF FRANCE

BY  
JEAN FRANÇOIS ALDEN

Consider this unique and imposing distinction. Since the writing of human history began, Joan of Arc is the only person, of either sex, who has ever held supreme command of the military forces of a nation *at the age of seventeen.*

LOUIS KOSSUTH.

Authorities examined in verification of the truthfulness of  
this narrative:

J. E. J. QUICHERAT, *Condamnation et Réhabilitation de  
Jeanne d'Arc.*

J. FABRE, *Procès de Condamnation de Jeanne d'Arc.*

H. A. WALLON, *Jeanne d'Arc.*

M. SEPET, *Jeanne d'Arc.*

J. MICHELET, *Jeanne d'Arc.*

BERRIAT DE SAINT-PRIX, *La Famille de Jeanne d'Arc.*

La Comtesse A. DE CHABANNES, *La Vierge Lorraine.*

Monseigneur RICARD, *Jeanne d'Arc la Vénérable.*

Lord RONALD GOWER, F.S.A., *Joan of Arc.*

JOHN O'HAGAN, *Joan of Arc.*

JANET TUCKEY, *Joan of Arc the Maid.*

## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

---

To arrive at a just estimate of a renowned man's character, one must judge it by the standards of his time, not ours. Judged by the standards of one century, the noblest characters of an earlier one lose much of their lustre; judged by the standards of to-day, there is probably no illustrious man of four or five centuries ago whose character could meet the test at all points. But the character of Joan of Arc is unique. It can be measured by the standards of all times without misgiving or apprehension as to the result. Judged by any of them, judged by all of them, it is still flawless, it is still ideally perfect; it still occupies the loftiest place possible to human attainment, a loftier one than has been reached by any other mere mortal.

When we reflect that her century was the brutalest, the wickedest, the rottenest in history since the darkest ages, we are lost in wonder at the miracle of such a product from such a soil. The contrast between her and her century is the contrast between day and night. She was truthful when lying was the common speech of men; she was honest when honesty was become a lost virtue; she was a keeper of promises when the keeping of a promise was expected of no one; she gave her great mind to great thoughts and great purposes when other great minds wasted themselves upon pretty fancies or upon poor ambitions; she was modest and fine and delicate when to be loud and coarse might be said to be universal; she was full of duty when a merciless cruelty was the rule; she was steadfast when stability was unknown, and honorable in an age which had forgotten what honor was; she was a rock of convictions in a time when men believed in nothing and scoffed at all things; she was unflinchingly true in an age that was false to the core; she maintained her personal dignity unimpaired in an age of fawnings and servilities;

she was of a dauntless courage when hope and courage had perished in the hearts of her nation; she was spotlessly pure in mind and body when society in the highest places was foul in both—she was all these things in an age when crime was the common business of lords and princes, and when the highest common business of Christendom were able to astonish even that infamous era and make it stand aghast at the spectacle of their atrocious lives black with unimaginable treacheries, butcheries, and bestialities.

She was perhaps the only entirely unselfish person whose name has a place in profane history. No vestige or suggestion of self-seeking can be found in any word or deed of hers. When she had rescued her King from his vagabondage, and set his crown upon his head, she was offered rewards and honors, but she refused them all, and would take nothing. All she would take for herself—if the King would grant it—was leave to go back to her village home, and tend her sheep again, and feel her mother's arms about her, and be her housemaid and helper. The selfishness of this unspoiled general of victorious armies, companion of princes, and idol of an applauding and grateful nation, reached but that far and no farther.

The work wrought by Joan of Arc may fairly be regarded as ranking any recorded in history, when one considers the conditions under which it was undertaken, the obstacles in the way, and the means at her disposal. Caesar carried conquest far, but he did it with the trained and confident veterans of Rome, and was a trained soldier himself; and Napoleon swept away the disciplined armies of Europe, but he also was a trained soldier, and he began his work with patriot battalions inflamed and inspired by the miracle-working new breath of Liberty breathed upon them by the Revolution—eager young apprentices to the splendid trade of war, not old and broken men-at-arms, despairing survivors of an age-long accumulation of monotonous defeats; but Joan of Arc, a mere child in years, ignorant, unlettered, a poor village girl unknown and without influence, found a great nation lying in chains, helpless and hopeless under an alien domination, its treasury bankrupt, its soldiers disheartened and dispersed, all spirit torpid, all courage dead in the hearts of the people through long years of foreign and domestic outrage and oppression, their King cowed, resigned to its fate, and preparing to fly the country; and she laid her hand upon this nation, this corpse, and it rose and followed her. She led it from victory to victory, she turned back the tide of the Hundred Years' War, she

fatally crippled the English power, and died with the earned title of  
DELIVERER OF FRANCE, which she bears to this day.  
And for all reward, the French King whom she had crowned  
stood supine and indifferent while French priests took the noble  
child, the most innocent, the most lovely, the most adorable the ages  
have produced, and burned her alive at the stake.

## A PECULIARITY OF JOAN OF ARC'S HISTORY

---

The details of the life of Joan of Arc form a biography which is unique among the world's biographies in one respect: *It is the only story of a human life which comes to us under oath*, the only one which comes to us from the witness-stand. The official records of the Great Trial of 1431, and of the Process of Rehabilitation of a quarter of a century later, are still preserved in the National Archives of France, and they furnish with remarkable fulness the facts of her life. The history of no other life of that remote time is known with either the certainty or the comprehensiveness that attaches to hers.

The Sieur Louis de Conte is faithful to her official history in his Personal Recollections, and thus far his trustworthiness is unimpeachable; but his mass of added particulars must depend for credit upon his own word alone.

THE TRANSLATOR.

# Contents

Book I  
In Domremy  
Page 555

Book II  
In Court and Camp  
Page 613

Book III  
Trial and Martyrdom  
Page 839

THE SIEUR LOUIS DE CONTE  
TO HIS GREAT-GREAT-GRAND  
NEPHEWS AND NIECES

THIS is the year 1492. I am eighty-two years of age. The things I am going to tell you are things which I saw myself as a child and as a youth.

In all the tales and songs and histories of Joan of Arc which you and the rest of the world read and sing and study in the books wrought in the late invented art of printing, mention is made of me, the Sieur Louis de Conte—I was her page and secretary. I was with her from the beginning until the end.

I was reared in the same village with her. I played with her every day, when we were little children together, just as you play with your mates. Now that we perceive how great she was; now that her name fills the whole world, it seems strange that what I am saying is true; for it is as if a perishable paltry candle should speak of the eternal sun riding in the heavens and say, "He was gossip and housemate to me when we were candles together." And yet it is true, just as I say. I was her playmate, and I fought at her side in the wars; to this day I carry in my mind, fine and clear, the picture of that dear little figure, with breast bent to the flying horse's neck, charging at the head of the armies of France, her hair streaming back, her silver mail ploughing steadily deeper and deeper into the thick of the battle, sometimes nearly drowned from sight by tossing heads of horses, uplifted sword-arms, wind-blown plumes, and intercepting shields. I was with her to the end; and when that black day came whose accusing shadow will lie always upon the memory of the mitred French slaves of England who were her assassins, and upon France who stood idle and essayed no rescue, my hand was the last she touched in life.

As the years and the decades drifted by, and the spectacle of the marvellous child's meteor-flight across the war-firmament

BOOK I  
IN DOMREMY

*Chapter I*

I, THE Sieur Louis de Conte, was born in Neufchâteau, the 6th of January, 1410; that is to say, exactly two years before Joan of Arc was born in Domremy. My family had fled to those distant regions from the neighborhood of Paris in the first years of the century. In politics they were Armagnacs—patriots: they were for our own French King, crazy and impotent as he was. The Burgundian party, who were for the English, had stripped them, and done it well. They took everything but my father's small nobility, and when he reached Neufchâteau he reached it in poverty and with a broken spirit. But the political atmosphere there was the sort he liked, and that was something. He came to a region of comparative quiet; he left behind him a region peopled with furies, madmen, devils, where slaughter was a daily pastime and no man's life safe for a moment. In Paris, mobs roared through the streets nightly, sacking, burning, killing, unmolested, uninterrupted. The sun rose upon wrecked and smoking buildings, and upon mutilated corpses lying here, there, and yonder about the streets, just as they fell, and stripped naked by thieves, the unholy gleaners after the mob. None had the courage to gather these dead for burial; they were left there to rot and create plagues.

And plagues they did create. Epidemics swept away the people like flies, and the burials were conducted secretly and by night; for public funerals were not allowed, lest the revelation of the magnitude of the plague's work unman the people and plunge them into despair. Then came, finally, the bitterest winter which had visited France in five hundred years. Famine, pestilence, slaughter, ice, snow—Paris had all these at once. The dead lay in heaps about the streets, and *wolves entered the city in daylight and devoured them.*

Ah, France had fallen low—so low! For more than three quarters of a century the English fangs had been bedded in

BOOK I  
IN DOMREMY

*Chapter I*

---

I, THE Sieur Louis de Conte, was born in Neufchâteau, the 6th of January, 1410; that is to say, exactly two years before Joan of Arc was born in Domremy. My family had fled to those distant regions from the neighborhood of Paris in the first years of the century. In politics they were Armagnacs—patriots: they were for our own French King, crazy and impotent as he was. The Burgundian party, who were for the English, had stripped them, and done it well. They took everything but my father's small nobility, and when he reached Neufchâteau he reached it in poverty and with a broken spirit. But the political atmosphere there was the sort he liked, and that was something. He came to a region of comparative quiet; he left behind him a region peopled with furies, madmen, devils, where slaughter was a daily pastime and no man's life safe for a moment. In Paris, mobs roared through the streets nightly, sacking, burning, killing, unmolested, uninterrupted. The sun rose upon wrecked and smoking buildings, and upon mutilated corpses lying here, there, and yonder about the streets, just as they fell, and stripped naked by thieves, the unholy gleaners after the mob. None had the courage to gather these dead for burial; they were left there to rot and create plagues.

And plagues they did create. Epidemics swept away the people like flies, and the burials were conducted secretly and by night; for public funerals were not allowed, lest the revelation of the magnitude of the plague's work unman the people and plunge them into despair. Then came, finally, the bitterest winter which had visited France in five hundred years. Famine, pestilence, slaughter, ice, snow—Paris had all these at once. The dead lay in heaps about the streets, and *wolves entered the city in daylight and devoured them.*

Ah, France had fallen low—so low! For more than three quarters of a century the English fangs had been bedded in

her flesh, and so cowed had her armies become by ceaseless rout and defeat that it was said and accepted that the mere sight of an English army was sufficient to put a French one to flight.

When I was five years old the prodigious disaster of Agincourt fell upon France; and although the English king went home to enjoy his glory, he left the country prostrate and a prey to roving bands of Free Companions in the service of the Burgundian party, and one of these bands came raiding through Neufchâteau one night, and by the light of our burning roof-thatch I saw all that were dear to me in this world (save an elder brother, your ancestor, left behind with the Court) butchered while they begged for mercy, and heard the butchers laugh at their prayers and mimic their pleadings. I was overlooked, and escaped without hurt. When the savages were gone I crept out and cried the night away watching the burning houses; and I was all alone, except for the company of the dead and the wounded, for the rest had taken flight and hidden themselves.

I was sent to Domremy, to the priest, whose house-keeper became a loving mother to me. The priest in the course of time taught me to read and write, and he and I were the only persons in the village who possessed this learning.

At the time that the house of this good priest, Guillaume Fronte, became my home, I was six years old. We lived close by the village church, and the small garden of Joan's parents was behind the church. As to that family, there were Jacques d'Arc the father, his wife Isabel Romée; three sons—Jacques, ten years old, Pierre, eight, and Jean, seven; Joan, four, and her baby sister Catherine, about a year old. I had these children for playmates from the beginning. I had some other playmates besides—particularly four boys: Pierre Morel, Étienne Roze, Noël Rainguesson, and Edmond Aubrey, whose father was maire at that time; also two girls, about Joan's age, who by-and-by became her favorites; one was named Haumette, the other was called Little Mengette. These girls were common peasant children, like Joan herself. When they grew up, both married common laborers. Their estate was lowly enough, you see; yet a time came, many years after, when no passing stranger, howsoever great he might be,

failed to go and pay his reverence to those two humble old women who had been honored in their youth by the friendship of Joan of Arc.

These were all good children, just of the ordinary peasant type; not bright, of course—you would not expect that—but good-hearted and companionable, obedient to their parents and the priest; and as they grew up they became properly stocked with narrownesses and prejudices got at second hand from their elders, and adopted without reserve; and without examination also—which goes without saying. Their religion was inherited, their politics the same. John Huss and his sort might find fault with the Church, in Domremy it disturbed nobody's faith; and when the split came, when I was fourteen, and we had three Popes at once, nobody in Domremy was worried about how to choose among them—the Pope of Rome was the right one, a Pope outside of Rome was no Pope at all. Every human creature in the village was an Armagnac—a patriot—and if we children hotly hated nothing else in the world, we did certainly hate the English and Burgundian name and polity in that way.